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SUBJECT: BENIN: PRESIDENTIAL COALITION WINS PLURALITY OF VOTES AND
CONTROL OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

REF: COTONOU 0272

PRESIDENT YAYI WINS CONTROL OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: On May 4, Benin's National Assembly members, composed of the 83 legislators voted into office at the March 31 elections, selected their new 6-member Executive Board. The slate of candidates from parties supporting President Yayi won all the positions, with 44 votes, confirming that Yayi and his allies have succeeded in constructing a working majority in the new Assembly.
END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) As reported in reftel, the coalition "Force Cowrie for an Emerging Benin" (FCBE), which is closely linked to President Boni Yayi, won a plurality of 35 seats, and was in a strong position to find enough small party allies to build a majority. In the end, the FCBE claims that they have signed up at least 11 additional members of the Assembly, for a 46-member strong majority. Two junior positions among the six Executive Board seats went to small allied parties, with FCBE taking the remaining four positions, including the Presidency of the Assembly. How easy or solid these negotiations were remains to be seen. Several local commentators were surprised that it took nearly two weeks after the Assembly's April 23 inauguration for the FCBE to exercise their majority successfully and elect the new Board. President Yayi has personally noted to the Ambassador his disappointment that the FCBE slate received only 44, instead of the expected 46 votes, though it is hard to know who the two wayward members were in the secret ballot.

¶3. (U) The new president of the National Assembly is Mathurin Nago, who had been, up until his election to the Assembly, serving as Yayi's Minister of Higher Education and Vocational Training. Nago, who has previously served in the National Assembly from 1995 to 1999, is a professor of Biochemistry and Food Science, and former Dean of the Faculty of Agronomy at the University of Abomey Calavi. Many observers believe that his combination of a cool temperament, strong personality, and past legislative experience could make him an effective leader of the new legislature.

UP NEXT: A GOVERNMENT RESHUFFLE

¶4. (U) In addition to Mathurin Nago, four other ministers from Yayi's current government won seats in the Assembly. Political speculation in Benin has, therefore, now turned to the question of what changes the President will make in his government. Latest reports indicate that President Yayi will announce his new team quickly, no later than May 12. All eyes are on whether Yayi will only make the minimum changes required, or whether he will use the opportunity to shift even some of his ministers who were not

involved in the elections.

COMMENT

¶5. (SBU) With 64 new members, and only 19 who were able to win re-election, the new National Assembly holds the prospect for significant political renewal. Many of the new members, however, are untested, and not all, including some within the President's coalition, are free from the taint of scandal or corruption. Nonetheless, the FCBE's success in controlling the Executive Board of the Assembly represents another important victory for Yayi. With both the government and the legislature under his control, Yayi has unrivalled influence to set the legislative agenda for the next four years, and to mold the composition of most key state institutions, such as the Constitutional Court, as their current terms expire in the coming years. END COMMENT

BROWN